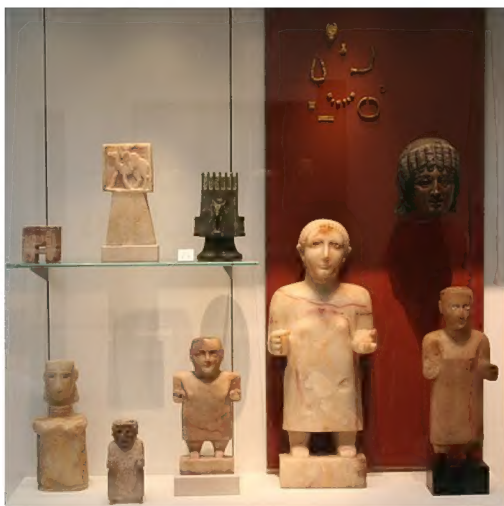


Ancient art

Ancient art refers to the many types of [art](#) produced by the [advanced cultures](#) of [ancient societies](#) with different [forms of writing](#), such as those of [China](#), [India](#), [Mesopotamia](#), [Persia](#), [Egypt](#), [Greece](#), and [Rome](#). The art of pre-literate societies is normally referred to as [prehistoric art](#) and is not covered by the scope of the [ancient era](#). Furthermore, although some [pre-Columbian cultures](#) developed writing in the centuries preceding the [European discovery of the Americas](#), these advancements are, on grounds of dating, largely covered with the dedicated topic of [pre-Columbian art](#) and associated sub-topics, such as [Maya art](#), [Aztec art](#), and [Olmec art](#).

West Asia and Mediterranean

Arabian



Pre-Islamic Arabian art in the [British Museum](#) (London)

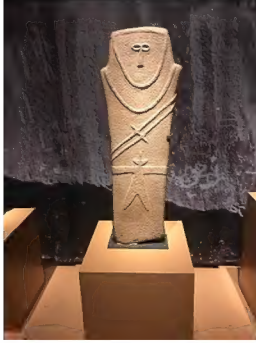
The art of [Pre-Islamic Arabia](#) is related to that of neighbouring cultures. Pre-Islamic [Yemen](#) produced stylized [alabaster](#) heads of great aesthetic and historic charm. Most of the pre-Islamic sculptures are made of [alabaster](#).

[Archaeology](#) has revealed some early settled civilizations in [Saudi Arabia](#): the [Dilmun](#) civilization on the east of the Arabian Peninsula, [Thamud](#) north of the [Hejaz](#), and [Kinda](#) and [Al-Magar](#) civilization in the central of Arabian Peninsula. The earliest known events in Arabian history are migrations from the peninsula into neighbouring areas.^[1] In antiquity, the role of [South Arabian](#) societies such as Saba ([Sheba](#)) in the production and trade of aromatics not only brought such kingdoms wealth but also tied the [Arabian Peninsula](#) into trade networks, resulting in far-ranging artistic influences.

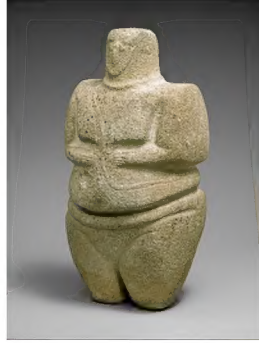
Ancient art	
	
Greek mosaic at the Archaeological Museum of Pella depicting Alexander the Great (left; identified by his kausia) and his friend Craterus fighting an Asiatic lion , late 4th century BC	
Years active	Antiquity

It seems probable that before around 4000 BC the Arabian climate was somewhat wetter than today, benefitting from a monsoon system that has since moved south. During the late fourth millennium BC permanent settlements began to appear, and inhabitants adjusted to the emerging dryer conditions. In southwestern Arabia (modern [Yemen](#)) a moister climate supported several kingdoms during the second and first millennia BC. The most famous of these is [Sheba](#), the kingdom of the biblical [Queen of Sheba](#). These societies used a combination of trade in spices and the natural resources of the region, including aromatics such as frankincense and myrrh, to build wealthy kingdoms. [Mārib](#), the [Sabaean](#) capital, was well positioned to tap into Mediterranean as well as Near Eastern trade, and in kingdoms to the east, in what is today [Oman](#), trading links with [Mesopotamia](#), [Persia](#), and even India were possible. The area was never a part of the [Assyrian](#) or [Persian empires](#), and even [Babylonian](#) control of north-west Arabia seems to have been relatively short-lived. Later Roman attempts to control the region's lucrative trade were foundered. This impenetrability to foreign armies doubtless augmented ancient rulers' bargaining power in the spice and incense trade.

Although subject to external influences, south Arabia retained characteristics particular to itself. The human figure is typically based on strong, square shapes, the fine modeling of detail contrasting with a stylized simplicity of form.



Stele of a male wearing a [baldric](#); 4th millennium BC; sandstone; height: 92 cm; from [Al-'Ula \(Saudi Arabia\)](#); in a temporary exhibition in the [National Museum of Korea \(Seoul\)](#), named Roads of Arabia: Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia



Standing female figure wearing a strap and a necklace; 3rd–2nd millennium BC; [sandstone](#) and [quartzite](#); height: 27.5 cm, width: 14.3 cm, depth: 14.3 cm; from [Mareb \(Yemen\)](#); [Metropolitan Museum of Art \(New York City\)](#)



Incense burner; mid-1st millennium BC; bronze; height: 27.6 cm, width: 23.7 cm; depth: 23.3 cm; from Southwestern Arabia; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



South Arabian head; 300-1 BC; alabaster; height: 20.5 cm, length: 11 cm, depth: 8.5 cm; [Louvre](#)



Decorated capital of a pillar from the royal palace of [Shabwa](#); stratigraphic context: first half of the 3rd century BC; [National Museum of Yemen \(Aden\)](#)



Funerary stele; 1st-3rd centuries AD; alabaster; height: 55 cm, width: 29 cm, depth: 8 cm; [Louvre](#)



Perfume-burner with an ibex;
1st–3rd century AD;
limestone; from [Yemen](#);
height: 30 cm, width: 24 cm,
depth: 24 cm; Louvre



Bahraini figurative funerary
stele; about 2nd-3rd century;
the Bahrain pavilion of [Expo](#)
[2015](#) ([Milan](#), Italy)

Egyptian

Due to the highly religious nature of ancient [Ancient Egyptian](#) civilization, many of the great works of ancient Egypt depict gods, goddesses, and [Pharaohs](#), who were also considered divine. The idea of order characterizes ancient Egyptian art. Clear and simple lines combined with simple shapes and flat areas of colour helped to create a sense of order and balance in the art of ancient Egypt. Ancient Egyptian artists used vertical and horizontal reference lines to maintain the correct proportions in their work. Political and religious, as well as artistic, order was also maintained in Egyptian art. To clearly define the social hierarchy of a situation, figures were drawn to sizes that were based not on their distance from the painter's perspective but on relative importance. For instance, the Pharaoh would be drawn as the largest figure in a painting no matter where he was situated, and a greater God would be drawn larger than a lesser god.

Symbolism also played an important role in establishing a sense of order. Symbolism, ranging from the Pharaoh's regalia (symbolizing his power to maintain order) to the individual symbols of Egyptian gods and goddesses, was omnipresent in Egyptian art. Animals were usually also highly symbolic figures in Egyptian art. Colour, as well, had extended meaning—blue and green represented the Nile and life; yellow stood for the sun god; and red represented power and vitality. The colours in Egyptian artifacts have survived extremely well over the centuries because of Egypt's dry climate.

Despite the stilted form caused by a lack of perspective, ancient Egyptian art is often highly realistic. Ancient Egyptian artists often show a sophisticated knowledge of anatomy and close attention to detail, especially in their renderings of animals. During the 18th Dynasty of Egypt a Pharaoh by the name of [Akhenaton](#) took the throne and abolished the traditional [polytheism](#). He formed a monotheistic religion based on the worship of Aten, a sun god. Artistic change

followed political upheaval. A new style of art was introduced that was more naturalistic than the stylized frieze favored in Egyptian art for the previous 1700 years. After Akhenaton's death, however, Egyptian artists reverted to their old styles.

Faience that was produced in **ancient Egyptian** antiquity as early as 3500 BC was in fact superior to the tin-glazed **earthenware** of the European 15th century.^[2] **Ancient Egyptian faience** was not made of **clay** but instead actually of a **ceramic** composed primarily of **quartz**.



Stele of Princess **Nefertabet** eating; 2589–2566 BC; limestone & paint; height: 37.7 cm, length: 52.5 cm, depth: 8.3 cm; from **Giza**; **Louvre** (Paris)



Pectoral and necklace of Princess **Sithathoriunet**; 1887–1813 BC; gold, **carnelian**, **lapis lazuli**, **turquoise**, **garnet** & **feldspar**; height of the pectoral: 4.5 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (New York City)



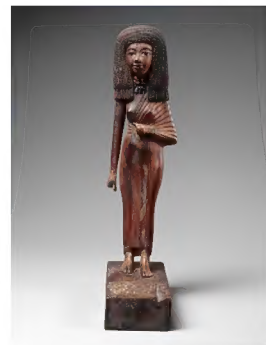
William the Faience Hippopotamus; 1961–1878 BC; faience; 11.2 × 7.5 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art**



Kneeling portrait statue of **Amenemhat** holding a stele with an inscription; circa 1500 BC; limestone; **Egyptian Museum of Berlin** (Germany)



Chair of **Hatnefer**; 1492–1473 BC; boxwood, cypress, ebony & linen cord; height: 53 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art**



Statuette of the lady **Tiye**; 1390-1349 BC; wood, **carnelian**, gold, glass, **Egyptian blue** and paint; height: 24 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art**



Mask of [Tjuyu](#); c. 1387–1350 BC; gold, past of glass, alabaster and other materials; height: 40 cm; [Egyptian Museum \(Cairo\)](#)



The [Mask of Tutankhamun](#); c. 1327 BC; gold, glass and semi-precious stones; height: 54 cm; [Egyptian Museum](#)



The [Nefertiti Bust](#); 1352–1332 BC; painted [limestone](#); height: 50 cm; [Neues Museum \(Berlin, Germany\)](#)



The entrance of [the Great Temple of the Abu Simbel temples](#), founded around 1264 BC



Coffin of Nesykhonsu; c. 976 BC; gessoed and painted sycamore fig; overall: 70 cm; [Cleveland Museum of Art \(Cleveland, Ohio, US\)](#)



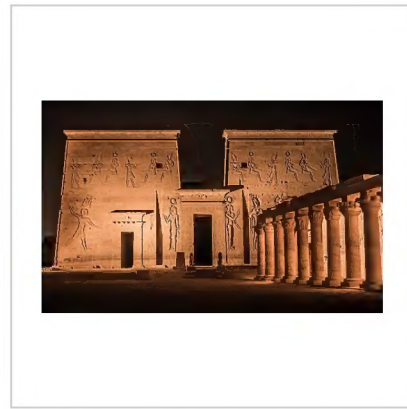
Complete set of canopic jars decorated with [hieroglyphics](#); 744–656 BC; painted sycamore fig wood; various heights; [British Museum \(London\)](#)



Cosmetic box in the shape of an Egyptian composite capital, its cap being in the left side; 664–300 BC; glassy faience; 8.5 × 9 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



Statuette of [Anubis](#); 332–30 BC; plastered and painted wood; 42.3 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



The well preserved The Temple of Isis from [Philae](#) (Egypt) is an example of [Egyptian architecture](#) and [architectural sculpture](#)



Illustration of various types of capitals, drawn by the egyptologist [Karl Richard Lepsius](#)

Etruscan

[Etruscan art](#) was produced by the [Etruscan civilization](#) in [central Italy](#) between the 9th and 2nd centuries BC. From around 600 BC it was heavily influenced by [Greek art](#), which was imported by the Etruscans, but always retained distinct characteristics. Particularly strong in this tradition were figurative sculpture in terracotta (especially life-size on [sarcophagi](#) or temples), wall painting, and [metalworking](#), especially in bronze. Jewelry and [engraved gems](#) of high quality were produced.^[3]

Etruscan sculpture in cast bronze was famous and widely exported, but relatively few large examples have survived (the material was too valuable, and recycled later). In contrast to terracotta and bronze, there was relatively little Etruscan sculpture in stone, despite the

Etruscans controlling fine sources of marble, including [Carrara marble](#), which seems not to have been exploited until the Romans.

The great majority of survivals came from tombs, which were typically crammed with [sarcophagi](#) and [grave goods](#), and terracotta fragments of architectural sculpture, mostly around temples. Tombs have produced all the [fresco](#) wall paintings, which show scenes of feasting and some narrative mythological subjects.



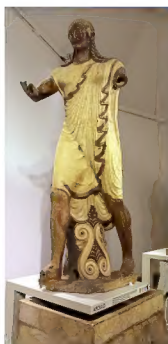
The [Monteleone chariot](#); 2nd quarter of the 6th century BC; bronze and ivory; total height: 130.9 cm, length of the pole: 209 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



The [Sarcophagus of the Spouses](#); 530–520 BC; terracotta; 1.14 m x 1.9 m; from a tomb of the Banditaccia necropolis ([Cerveteri](#), Italy); [Louvre City](#)



Water jar with [Herakles](#) and the [Hydra](#); circa 525 BC; black-figure pottery; height: 44.5 cm, diameter: 33.8 cm; [Getty Villa](#) ([California](#), US)



[Apollo of Veii](#); c. 510 BC; painted terracotta; height: 1.81 m; [National Etruscan Museum](#) ([Rome](#))



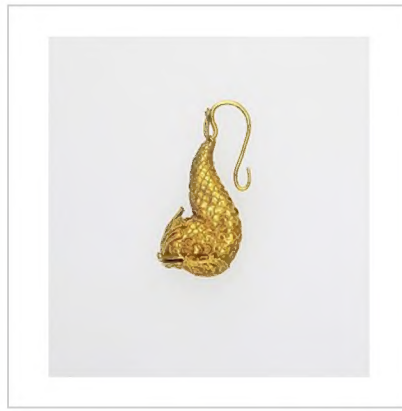
Fresco with dancers and musicians; c. 475 BC; fresco secco; height (of the wall): 1.7 m; [Tomb of the Leopards](#) ([Monterozzi necropolis](#), [Lazio](#), Italy)



The [Vulci set of jewelry](#); early 5th century; gold, glass, rock crystal, [agate](#) and [carnelian](#); various dimensions; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



Tripod base for a thymiaterion (incense burner); 475-450 BC; bronze; height: 11 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



Earring in the form of a dolphin; 5th century BC; gold; 2.1 × 1.4 × 4.9 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art

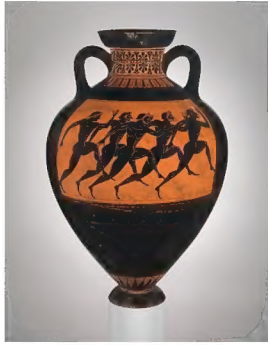
Greek



Capitals in the three Greek orders: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian

Ancient Greek art includes much pottery and sculpture, as well as architecture. Greek sculpture is known for the [contrapposto](#) standing of the figures. The art of Ancient Greece is usually divided stylistically into three periods: the Archaic, the Classical, and the Hellenistic. The history of Ancient Greek pottery is divided stylistically into periods: the Protogeometric, the Geometric, the Late Geometric or Archaic, the Black Figure, and the Red Figure. Ancient Greek art has survived most successfully in the forms of sculpture and architecture, as well as in such minor arts as coin design, pottery, and gem engraving.

The most prestigious form of Ancient Greek painting was [panel painting](#), now known only from literary descriptions; they perished rapidly after the 4th century AD when they were no longer actively protected. Today not much survives of Greek painting, except for late [mummy paintings](#) and a few paintings on the walls of tombs, mostly in Macedonia and Italy. Painting on pottery, of which a great deal survives, gives some sense of the aesthetics of Greek painting. The techniques involved, however, were very different from those used in large-format painting. It was mainly in black and [gold](#) and was painted using different paints than the ones used on walls or wood, because it was a different surface.



The *Euphiletos Painter*
Panathenaic prize amphora;
530 BC; painted terracotta;
height: 62.2 cm; [Metropolitan
Museum of Art](#) (New York
City)



The *Artemision Bronze*; 460-
450 BC; bronze; height: 2.1
m; [National Archaeological
Museum](#) (Athens)



The *Parthenon* on the
Athenian Acropolis, the most
iconic *Doric* Greek temple
built of marble and limestone
between c. 460-406 BC,
dedicated to the goddess
Athena^[4]



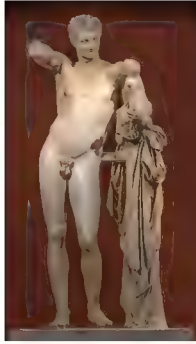
Mirror with a support in the
form of a draped woman;
mid-5th century BC; bronze;
height: 40.41 cm;
[Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



Calyx-krater; 400-375 BC;
ceramic; height: 27.9 cm,
diameter: 28.6 cm; from
[Thebes](#) (Greece); [Louvre](#)



The *Grave relief of Thraseas
and Euandria*; 375-350 BC;
Pentelic marble; height:
160 cm, width: 91 cm;
[Pergamon Museum](#) (Berlin)



Hermes and the Infant Dionysus; by *Praxiteles*; 330-320 BC; marble; height: 2.15 m; Archaeological Museum of Olympia (Olympia, Greece)^[5]



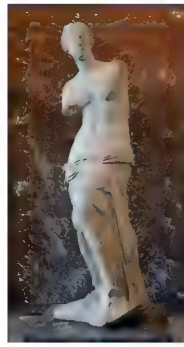
The *Alexander Sarcophagus*; 320–310 BC; marble; length: 3.18 m; Istanbul Archaeology Museums (Turkey)^[6]



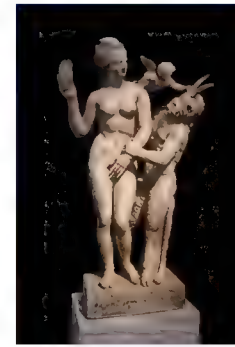
Volute krater; 320-310 BC; ceramic; height: 1.1 m; Walters Art Museum (Baltimore, US)



Statuette of a draped woman; 2nd century BC; terracotta; height: 29.2 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



Venus de Milo; 130–100 BC; marble; height: 203 cm (80 in); Louvre



Group of Aphrodite, Pan and Eros; circa 100 BC; marble; height (without base): 1.32 m; National Archaeological Museum (Athens)^[7]



Laocoön and His Sons; early first century BC; marble; height: 2.4 m; [Vatican Museums \(Vatican City\)](#)



Mosaic which represents the Epiphany of [Dionysus](#); 2nd century AD; from the Villa of Dionysus ([Dion, Greece](#)); [Archeological Museum of Dion](#)



Illustrations of examples of ancient Greek ornaments and patterns, drawn in 1874



Reconstructed [colour scheme](#) of the [entablature](#) on a [Doric temple](#), which shows that Ancient Greek temples were coloured, and not just white marble

Hittite

Hittite art was produced by the [Hittite civilization](#) in ancient [Anatolia](#), in modern-day [Turkey](#), and also stretching into [Syria](#) during the second millennium BC from the nineteenth century up until the twelfth century BC. This period falls under the Anatolian [Bronze Age](#). It is characterized by a long tradition of canonized images and motifs rearranged, while still being recognizable, by artists to convey meaning to a largely illiterate population.

"Owing to the limited vocabulary of figural types [and motifs], invention for the Hittite artist usually was a matter of combining and manipulating the units to form more complex compositions"^[8]

Many of these recurring images revolve around the depiction of [Hittite deities and ritual practices](#). There is also a prevalence of hunting scenes in Hittite relief and representational animal forms. Much of the art comes from settlements like [Alaca Höyük](#), or the Hittite capital of [Hattusa](#) near modern-day [Boğazkale](#). Scholars do have difficulty dating a large portion of Hittite art, citing the fact that there is a lack of inscription and much of the found material, especially from burial sites, was moved from their original locations and distributed among museums during the nineteenth century.



Drinking cup in the shape of a fist; 1400–1380 BC; silver; from Central Turkey; [Museum of Fine Arts \(Boston, US\)](#)



Vessel terminating in the forepart of a stag; c. 14th–13th century BC; silver with gold inlay; height: 18 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art \(New York City\)](#)



Seal of [Tarkasnawa](#), King of [Mira](#); circa 1220 BC; silver; height: 1 cm, diameter: 4.2 cm; [Walters Art Museum \(Baltimore, US\)](#)



Three reliefs from the [Adana Archaeology Museum](#) (Turkey)

Mesopotamian

Mesopotamia (from the Greek Μεσοποταμία "[land] between the rivers", in Syriac called ܡܕܢܗܪܝܢ pronounced "Beth Nahrain", "Land of rivers", rendered in Arabic as بلاد الرافدين bilād al-rāfidayn) is a toponym for the area of the **Tigris-Euphrates** river system, largely corresponding to modern-day Iraq, as well as some parts of northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and southwestern Iran. Within its boundaries, some of the most ancient civilizations known first developed **writing** and **agriculture**. Many civilizations flourished there, leaving behind a rich legacy of ancient art.

Bronze Age Mesopotamian civilizations included the Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian empires, and Sumer. In the Iron Age, Mesopotamia was ruled by the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires. The indigenous Sumerians and Akkadians (including Assyrians & Babylonians) dominated Mesopotamia from the beginning of written history (c. 3100 BC) to the fall of Babylon in 539 BC, when it was conquered by the Achaemenid Empire. It fell to Alexander the Great in 332 BC and after his death, it became part of the Greek Seleucid Empire.

Around 150 BC, Mesopotamia was under the control of the Parthians. Mesopotamia became a battleground between the Romans and Parthians, with parts of Mesopotamia (particularly Assyria) coming under periodic Roman control. In 226 AD, it fell to the Sassanid Persians and remained under Persian rule until the 7th-century Arab Islamic conquest of the Sassanid Empire. A number of primarily Christian native Mesopotamian states existed between the 1st century BC and the 3rd century AD, including Adiabene, Oshroene, and Hatra.

Assyrian



Cylinder seal with deities, one of them being on a winged lion; 8th–7th century BC; **cryptocrystalline quartz**; 4.09 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (New York City)

When Babylon began to decline, it was conquered by **Assyria**, one of its former colonies. Assyria inherited its arts as well as its empire.

At first, Assyrian **architects** and artists copied Babylonian styles and materials. Later, Assyrians began to shake themselves free of Babylonian influences. The walls of the Assyrian palaces were lined with slabs of stone instead of brick and were colored instead of painted as in **Chaldea**.

In place of the [bas relief](#), we have [sculpted figures](#), the earliest examples being the statues from [Girsu](#).

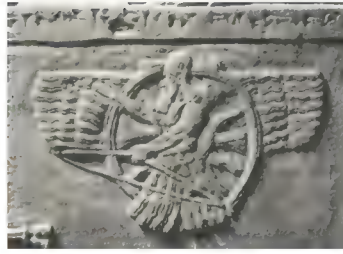
No remarkable specimens of metallurgic art from early Assyria have been found, but at a later epoch, great excellence was attained in the manufacture of such [jewellery](#) as earrings and bracelets of [gold](#). They also had skilled works using copper.

Assyrian pottery and [porcelain](#) were graceful. Transparent glass seems to have been first introduced in the reign of [Sargon II](#), like the [glass](#) discovered in the palaces of [Nineveh](#) – derived from [Egyptian](#) originals. Stone, as well as clay and glass, were employed in the manufacture of vases. Vases of hard stone have been disinterred at Tello, similar to those of the early dynastic period of Egypt.

Ashurbanipal promoted art and culture and had a vast library of cuneiform tablets at Nineveh.



Shalmaneser III, on the *Throne Dais of Shalmaneser III* at the [Iraq Museum](#).



A [Neo-Assyrian](#) relief of Ashur as a [feather robed archer](#) holding a bow instead of a ring (9th–8th century BC)



The [Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III](#). The king, surrounded by his royal attendants and a high-ranking official, receives a tribute from Sua, king of Gilzanu (north-west Iran), who bows and prostrates before the king. From [Nimrud](#), northern Mesopotamia (Iraq). [Neo-Assyrian period](#), 825 BC. The British Museum, London.



7th-century BC relief depicting [Ashurbanipal](#) (r. 669–631 BC) and three royal attendants in a [chariot](#). From the North Palace at [Nineveh](#)



Glazed terracotta tile from [Nimrud](#), with a court scene; 875–850 BC; fired and glazed clay; height (without base): 30.6 cm, height (with base): 38.3 cm; British Museum



Lammasu, an [Assyrian](#) protective deity. Initially depicted as a goddess in Sumerian times, when it was called *Lamma*, it was later depicted in Assyrian times as a hybrid of a human, bird, and either a bull or lion—specifically having a human head, the body of a bull or a lion, and bird wings, under the name *Lamassu*. [Iraq Museum](#)



Relief with a [winged genie](#) with [bucket and cone](#); 713–706 BC; height: 3.3 m; Louvre



[Lion weight](#); 6th–4th century BC; bronze; height: 29.5 cm; [Louvre](#)



Assyrian ornaments and patterns, illustrated in a book from 1920

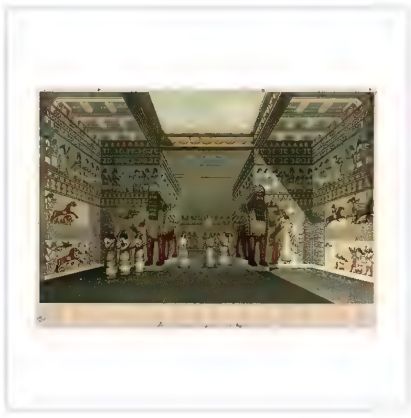


Illustration of a hall in the
Assyrian Palace of
Ashurnasirpal II by Austen
Henry Layard (1854)

Babylonian

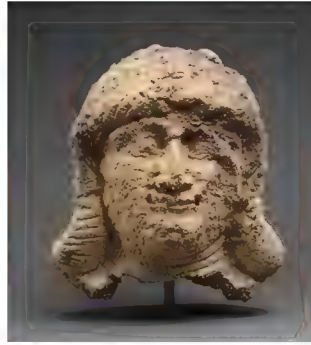
The conquest of Sumer and Akkad by Babylon marks a turning point in the artistic and political history of the region.

The Babylonians took advantage of the abundance of clay in Mesopotamia to create bricks. The use of brick led to the early development of the pilaster and column, as well as of frescoes and enameled tiles. The walls were brilliantly colored, and sometimes plated with bronze or gold as well as with tiles. Painted terra-cotta cones were also embedded in the plaster.

The Babylonians often worked with metal. They created functional tools with copper. It is possible that Babylonia was the original home of copperworking, which then spread westward. In addition, the want of stone in Babylonia made every pebble precious and led to a high perfection of the art of gem-cutting. The arts of Babylon also included tapestries, and Babylonian civilization was famous for its tapestries and rugs.



Detail of [Nebuchadnezzar II's Building Inscription](#) plaque of the [Ishtar Gate](#), from [Babylon, Iraq](#). 6th century BC. Pergamon Museum



Female head; circa 2000–1600 BC; ceramic; 18 x 12.7 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



Plaque with a nude female between two bearded males wearing kilts; circa 2000–1600 BC; bronze; 9.7 x 9.7 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



Cylinder seal with an impression; circa 18th–17th century BC; [hematite](#); 2.39 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



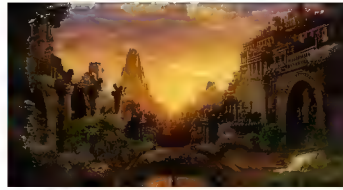
Male head; circa late 8th–early 7th century; ceramic; 12.5 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



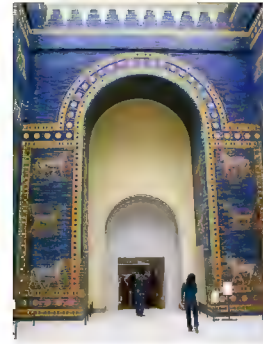
Facade of the Throne Room. [Babylon](#), coloured, glazed bricks. 604–562 BC. The Throne-Room was situated in the third courtyard complex of the royal palace.



Remains of brick structures in [Babylon](#)



Contemporary artwork depicting [Babylon](#) at the height of its stature.



The [Ishtar Gate](#) was the eighth gate to the inner city of [Babylon](#). It was constructed circa 575 BC by order of King [Nebuchadnezzar II](#) on the north side of the city.



Hammurabi (left), depicted as receiving his royal insignia from [Shamash](#) (or possibly [Marduk](#)). Hammurabi holds his hands over his mouth as a sign of prayer (relief on the upper part of the stele of [Hammurabi's code of laws](#)).

Sumerian

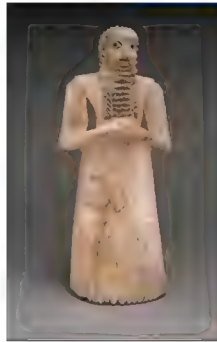
Archaeological evidence attests to their existence during the [5th millennium BC](#). The Sumerians decorated their [pottery](#) with [cedar oil paints](#). The Sumerians also developed [jewelry](#).

A notable example of surviving Sumerian art is the [Standard of Ur](#), dated to approximately 2500 BC. The Standard is a wooden box inlaid with shells and [lapis lazuli](#) depicting [soldiers](#) presenting

their **king** with prisoners on one side and **peasants** presenting him with gifts on the other.



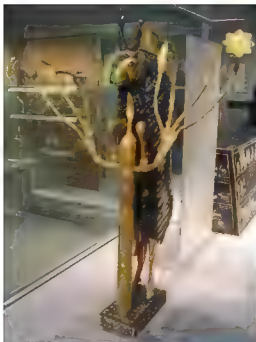
Cuneiform tablet; 3100–2900 BC; clay; 5.5 x 6 x 4.15 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (New York City)



Standing male worshiper, one of the twelve statues in the **Tell Asmar Hoard**; 2900–2600 BC; gypsum alabaster, shell, black limestone and bitumen; 29.5 x 12.9 x 10 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art**



Headdress; 2600–2500 BC; gold (the leaves), **lapis lazuli** (the blue beads) and **carnelian** (the orange beads); length: 38.5 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art**



Ram in a Thicket; 2600–2400 BC; gold, copper, shell, lapis lazuli and limestone; height: 45.7 cm; from the **Royal Cemetery at Ur (Dhi Qar Governorate, Iraq)**; **British Museum** (London)



Standard of Ur; 2600–2400 BC; shell, red limestone and lapis lazuli on wood; length: 49.5 cm; from the **Royal Cemetery at Ur**; **British Museum**



Bull's head ornament from a lyre; 2600–2350 BC; bronze inlaid with shell and **lapis lazuli**; height: 13.3 cm, width: 10.5 cm; **Metropolitan Museum of Art**



Golden helmet of [Meskalamdug](#), possible founder of the [First Dynasty of Ur](#), 26th century BC.



Votive figure; 2600–2350 BC; stone; height: 41.3 cm, width: 14.5 cm, depth: 13.5 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



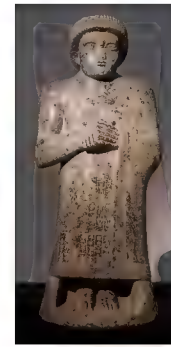
Vase with overlapping pattern and three bands of palm trees; mid- to late 3rd millennium BC; chlorite; height: 23.5 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



The [Statue of Ebih-II](#); c. 2400 BC; gypsum, schist, shells and lapis lazuli; height: 52.5 cm, width: 20.6 cm; discovered by [André Parrot](#) at the Temple of Ishtar ([Mari](#), Syria); [Louvre](#)



Fragment of a bas-relief with goddess [Ninsun](#); 2255–2040 BC; steatite; height: 14 cm; Louvre



[Statue of Gudea O](#); circa 2100 BC; [steatite](#); height: 0.63 m; [Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek](#) ([Copenhagen, Denmark](#))

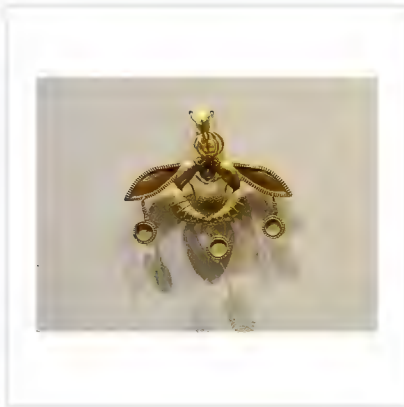
Minoan

The greatest civilization of the [Bronze Age](#) was that of the [Minoans](#), a mercantile people who built a trading empire from their homeland of [Crete](#) and from other Aegean islands. Minoan civilization was known for its beautiful [ceramics](#), but also for its [frescos](#), [landscapes](#), and stone carvings. In the early Minoan period, ceramics were characterized by spirals, triangles, curved lines, crosses, and fishbone motifs. In the middle Minoan period, naturalistic designs such as fish, squid, birds, and lilies were common. In the late Minoan period, flowers and animals were

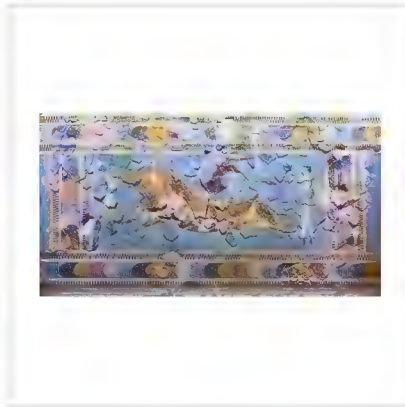
still the most characteristic, but variability had increased. The 'palace style' of the region around [Knossos](#) is characterized by strong geometric simplification of naturalistic shapes and by [monochromatic](#) painting. The Palace at Knossos was decorated with frescoes that showed aspects of daily life, including court rituals and entertainment such as bull-leaping and [boxing](#). The [Minoans](#) were skilled goldsmiths who created beautiful pendants and masks. The famous "[Malia Pendant](#)" of the Minoan times, found at Chrysosolakkos and now on display at the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, is an example of high-quality gold-smithery.^[9]



[Kamare ware](#) beaked jug; 1850-1675 BC; ceramic; height: 27 cm; from [Phaistos](#) (Crete, Greece); [Heraklion Archaeological Museum](#) (Greece)



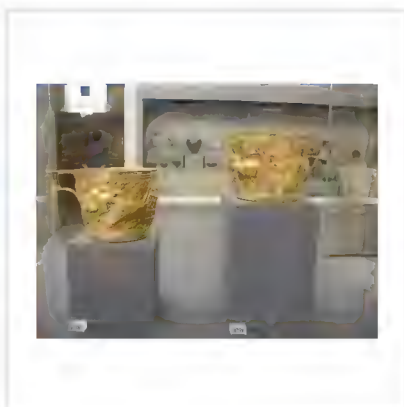
The [Malia Pendant](#), an iconic Minoan jewel; 1700-1600 BC; gold; width: 4.6 cm; from Chrysosolakkos (gold pit) complex at [Malia](#); Archaeological Museum of Heraklion^[10]



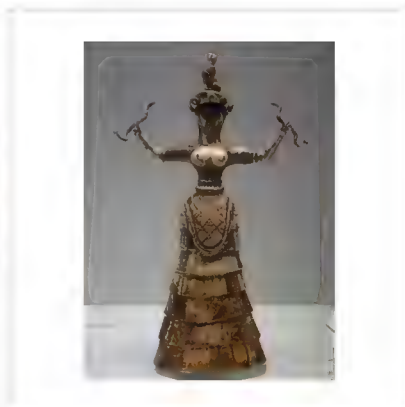
The fresco named the [Bull-Leaping Fresco](#); 1675-1460 BC; lime plaster; height: 0.8 m, width: 1 m; from the palace at [Knossos](#) (Crete); Heraklion Archaeological Museum



The [Grandstand Fresco](#); 1675-1460 BC; lime plaster; height (without border): 26 cm; from the Palace of Knossos; Heraklion Archaeological Museum



The [Vaphio Cups](#); 1675-1410 BC; gold; height: 7.8 cm, diameter: 10.7 cm; from [Vaphio](#) (Laconia, Greece); [National Archaeological Museum](#) (Athens)^[11]



[Snake goddess](#); 1460-1410 BC (from the Minoan Neopalatial Period); [faience](#); height: 29.5 cm; from the Temple Repository at Knossos; Heraklion Archaeological Museum^[12]



The *Hagia Triada sarcophagus*; 1370-1315 BC; limestone; length: 1.4 m, height: 0.9 m; from Chamber Tomb 4 at Hagia Triada, near [Phaistos](#) (Crete); Heraklion Archaeological Museum^[13]



The restored North Entrance of the [Knossos Palace Complex](#) with a charging bull [fresco](#)

Mycenaean

[Mycenaean](#) art is close to the Minoan and includes many splendid finds from the royal graves, most famously the [Mask of Agamemnon](#), a gold funeral mask. As may be seen from this item, the Mycenaeans specialized in gold working. Their artworks are known for a plethora of decorative motifs employed. At some point in their cultural history, the Mycenaeans adopted the Minoan goddesses and associated these goddesses with their sky god; scholars believe that the Greek pantheon of deities does not reflect Mycenaean religion except for the goddesses and Zeus. These goddesses, however, are Minoan in origin.



The *Mask of Agamemnon*, the most iconic Mycenaean artwork; 1675-1600 BC; gold; height: 25 cm, width: 27 cm, weight: 169 g; [National Archaeological Museum \(Athens\)](#)



Inlaid dagger; 1550-1500 BC; bronze, silver, gold and niello; length: 16 cm; [National Archaeological Museum \(Athens\)](#)^[14]



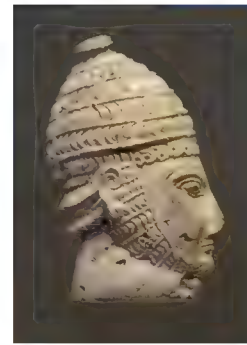
Three female figures; 1400-1300 BC; terracotta; heights: 10.8 cm, 10.8 cm and 10.5 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art \(New York City\)](#)



Two women and a child; 1400-1300 BC; ivory; height: 7.8 cm; [National Archaeological Museum \(Athens\)](#)^[14]



Necklace; 1400-1050 BC; gilded terracotta; diameter of the rosettes: 2.7 cm, with variations of circa 0.1 cm, length of the pendant 3.7 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



Head of a warrior; 1300-1200 BC; ivory; height: 8 cm; [National Archaeological Museum \(Athens\)](#)^[14]



The [Lion Gate](#), built in circa 1250 BC, an iconic Mycenaean building



Stirrup jar with octopus; circa 1200-1100 BC; terracotta; height: 26 cm, diameter: 21.5 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art

Persian

Achaemenid art includes [frieze](#) reliefs, metalwork, decoration of palaces, glazed brick masonry, fine craftsmanship (masonry, carpentry, etc.), and gardening. Most survivals of court art are monumental sculptures, above all the [reliefs](#), double animal-headed [Persian column](#) capitals and other sculptures of [Persepolis](#).^[15]

Although the Persians took artists, with their styles and techniques, from all corners of their empire, they produced not simply a combination of styles, but a synthesis of a new unique Persian style.^[16] Cyrus the Great in fact had an extensive ancient Iranian heritage behind him; the rich Achaemenid gold work, which inscriptions suggest may have been a specialty of the Medes, was for instance in the tradition of earlier sites.

There are a number of very fine pieces of jewellery or inlay in precious metal, also mostly featuring animals, and the [Oxus Treasure](#) has a wide selection of types. Small pieces, typically in gold, were sewn to clothing by the elite, and a number of gold [torcs](#) have survived.^[15]



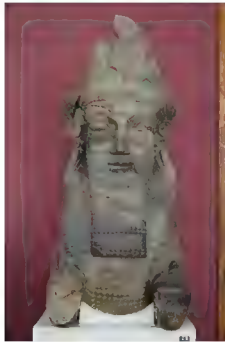
Relief from [Persepolis \(Iran\)](#) that represents people who carry bowls and [amphoraes](#)



Frieze of archers; c. 510 BC; bricks; from the [Palace of Darius at Susa](#); [Louvre](#)



Gold bracelet, part of the [Oxus Treasure](#); 5th to 4th century BC; gold; width: 11.6 cm; [British Museum \(London\)](#)



Column capital; 5th to 4th century BC; stone; height: 1.75 m; from [Persepolis](#); [National Museum of Iran \(Teheran\)](#)

Phoenician

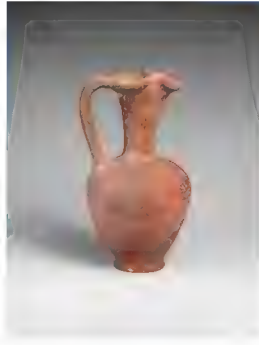
Phoenician art lacks unique characteristics that might distinguish it from its contemporaries. This is due to its being highly influenced by foreign artistic cultures: primarily [Egypt](#), Greece, and [Assyria](#). Phoenicians who were taught on the banks of the [Nile](#) and the [Euphrates](#) gained a wide artistic experience and finally came to create their own art, which was an amalgam of foreign models and perspectives.^[17] In an article from [The New York Times](#) published on January 5, 1879, Phoenician art was described by the following:

He entered into other men's labors and made most of his heritage. The [Sphinx](#) of Egypt became [Asiatic](#), and its new form was transplanted to [Nineveh](#) on the one side and to Greece on the other. The rosettes and other patterns of the

Babylonian cylinders were introduced into the handiwork of Phoenicia, and so passed on to the West, while the hero of the ancient Chaldean epic became first the Tyrian Melkarth, and then the Herakles of Hellas.



Decorative plaque which depicts a fighting of man and griffin; 900–800 BC; Nimrud ivories; Cleveland Museum of Art (Ohio, US)



Oinochoe; 800-700 BC; terracotta; height: 24.1 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City)



Face bead; mid-4th–3rd century BC; glass; height: 2.7 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



Earring from a pair, each with four relief faces; late 4th–3rd century BC; gold; overall: 3.5 x 0.6 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art

Roman



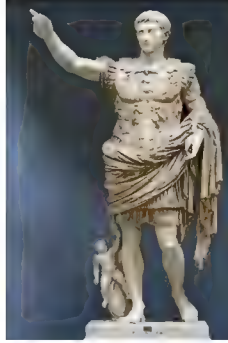
The *Maison Carrée* in *Nîmes* (France), one of the best conserved Ancient Roman temples, photoed from two angles

It is commonly said that Roman art was derivative of Greek and *Etruscan art*. Indeed, the villas of the wealthy Romans unearthed in *Pompeii* and *Herculaneum* show a strong predilection for all things Greek. Many of the most significant Greek artworks survive by virtue of their Roman interpretation and imitation. Roman artists sought to commemorate great events in the life of their state and to glorify their emperors as well as record the inner life of people, and express ideas of beauty and nobility. Their busts, and especially the images of individuals on gravestones, are very expressive and lifelike, finished with skill and panache.

In Greece and Rome, wall painting was not considered high art. The most prestigious form of art besides sculpture was panel painting, i.e. tempera or *encaustic painting* on wooden panels. Unfortunately, since wood is a perishable material, only a very few examples of such paintings have survived, namely the Severan Tondo from circa 200 AD, a very routine official portrait from some provincial government office, and the well-known Fayum mummy portraits, all from Roman Egypt, and almost certainly not of the highest contemporary quality. The portraits were attached to burial mummies at the face, from which almost all have now been detached. They usually depict a single person, showing the head, or head and upper chest viewed frontally. The background is always monochrome, sometimes with decorative elements. In terms of artistic tradition, the images clearly derive more from Greco-Roman traditions than Egyptian ones. They are remarkably realistic, though variable in artistic quality, and may indicate the similar art which was widespread elsewhere but did not survive. A few portraits painted on glass and medals from the later empire have survived, as have coin portraits, some of which are considered very realistic as well. *Pliny the Younger* complained of the declining state of Roman portrait art, "The painting of portraits which used to transmit through the ages the accurate likenesses of people, has entirely gone out [...] Indolence has destroyed the arts."



Bronze statuette of a philosopher on a lamp stand; late 1st century BC; bronze; overall: 27.3 cm; weight: 2.9 kg; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



Augustus of Prima Porta; circa 20 BC; white [marble](#); height: 2.06 m; [Vatican Museums](#) (Vatican City)



Restoration of a fresco from an Ancient villa bedroom; 50-40 BC; dimensions of the room: 265.4 x 334 x 583.9 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



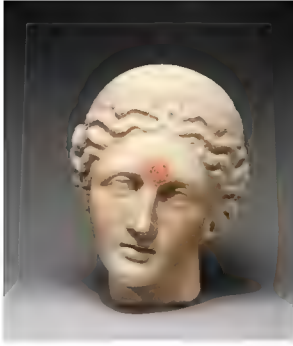
Altar with [festoons](#); circa 50 AD; marble; height: 99.5 cm, width: 61.5 cm, depth: 47 cm; [Louvre](#)



[Calyx-krater](#) with reliefs of maidens and dancing maenads; 1st century AD; [Pentelic marble](#); height: 80.7 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



Panoramic view of the [Pantheon](#) (Rome), built between 113 and 125



Head of a goddess wearing a diadem; 1st–2nd century; marble; height: 23 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



Couch and footstool; 1st–2nd century AD; wood, bone and glass; couch: 105.4 × 76.2 × 214.6 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



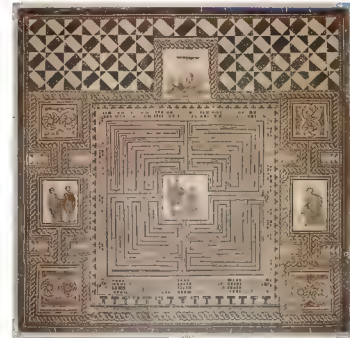
Sarcophagus with [Apollo](#), [Minerva](#) and the [Muses](#); circa 200 AD; from [Via Appia](#); [Antikensammlung Berlin](#) (Berlin)



Sarcophagus with [festoons](#); 200–225; marble; 134.6 x 223.5 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art



Triumph of Neptune standing on a chariot pulled by two sea horses; mid-3rd century; [Sousse Archaeological Museum](#) (Tunisia)



The *Theseus Mosaic*; 300–400 AD; marble and limestone pebbles; 4.1 x 4.2 m; [Kunsthistorisches Museum](#) (Vienna, Austria)

Central and South Asia

Bactrian

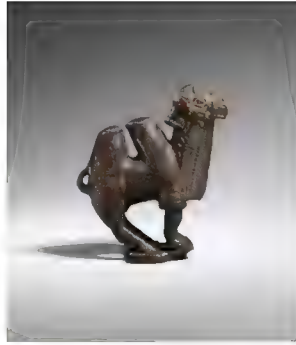
The Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex is the modern archaeological designation for a [Bronze Age civilization](#) of [Central Asia](#), dated to c. 2300–1700 BC, in present-day northern [Afghanistan](#), eastern [Turkmenistan](#), southern [Uzbekistan](#), and western [Tajikistan](#), centred on the upper [Amu Darya](#) (Oxus River). Its sites were discovered and named by the [Soviet](#) archaeologist [Viktor Sarianidi](#) (1976). Monumental urban centres, palaces, and cultic buildings were uncovered, notably at Gonur-depe in Turkmenistan.

BMAC materials have been found in the [Indus Valley civilisation](#), on the [Iranian Plateau](#), and in the [Persian Gulf](#).^[18] Finds within BMAC sites provide further evidence of trade and cultural contacts. They include an Elamite-type cylinder seal and a [Harappan](#) seal stamped with an elephant and Indus script found at Gonur-depe.^[19] The relationship between Altyn-Depe and the Indus Valley seems to have been particularly strong. Among the finds, there were two [Harappan](#) seals and ivory objects. The Harappan settlement of [Shortugai](#) in Northern Afghanistan on the banks of the [Amu Darya](#) probably served as a trading station.^[20]

A famous type of Bactrian artwork is the "Bactrian princesses" (a.k.a. "Oxus ladies"). Wearing large stylized dresses with puffed sleeves, as well as headdresses that merge with the hair, they embody the ranking goddess, a character of the central Asian mythology that plays a regulatory role, pacifying the untamed forces. These statuettes are made by combining and assembling materials of contrasting colours. The preferred materials are [chlorite](#) (or similar dark green stones), a whitish limestone or mottled [alabaster](#), or marine shells from the [Indian Ocean](#).^[21] The different elements of body and costume were carved separately and joined, as in a puzzle, by tenon and mortices glue.



Axe with eagle-headed demon & animals; late 3rd millennium-early 2nd millennium BC; [gilt silver](#); length: 15 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



Camel figurine; late 3rd–early 2nd millennium BC; copper alloy; 8.89 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



Monstrous male figure; late 3rd–early 2nd millennium BC; [chlorite](#), [calcite](#), gold, and iron; height: 10.1 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



Female figurine of the "Bactrian princess" type; 2500–1500; chlorite (dress and headdress) and limestone (head, hands and a leg); height: 13.33 cm; [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) (US)

Indian

The first sculptures in [India](#) date back to the [Indus Valley civilization](#) some 5,000 years ago when small stone carvings and bronze castings have been discovered. Later, as [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#) and [Jainism](#) developed further, India produced some of the most intricate bronzes in the world, as well as unrivaled temple carvings, some in huge shrines, such as the one at [Ellora](#).

The [Ajanta Caves](#) in [Maharashtra](#), India are [rock-cut](#) cave monuments dating back to the second century BC and containing paintings and sculpture considered to be masterpieces of both Buddhist religious art and universal pictorial art.^[22]



Ceremonial vessel; 2600-2450 BC; terracotta with black paint; 49.53 × 25.4 cm; [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) (US)



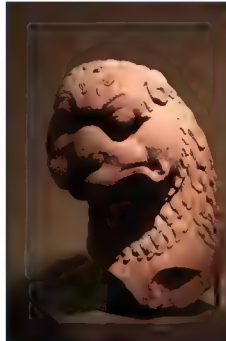
Stamp seal and modern impression: unicorn and incense burner (?); 2600-1900 BC; burnt [steatite](#); 3.8 × 3.8 × 1 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



The [Dancing Girl](#); 2400–1900 BC; bronze; height: 10.8 cm; [National Museum](#) ([New Delhi](#), India)



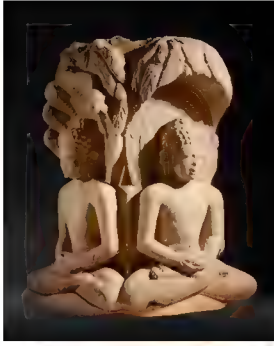
The [Priest-King](#); 2400–1900 BC; low fired [steatite](#); height: 17.5 cm; [National Museum of Pakistan](#) (Karachi)



Head and chest of a lion; circa 5th century; [sandstone](#); height: 61 cm, width: 35.6 cm; [Museum of Fine Arts](#) (Boston, US)



Seated Buddha; circa 475; sandstone; height: 1.6 m; [Sarnath Museum](#) (India)



Chaumukha idol; circa 600;
sandstone; 58.42 x 43.18 x
44.45 cm; Los Angeles
County Museum of Art



Bodhisattva Padmapani; 450–
490; pigments on rock;
height: circa 1.2 m; [Ajanta](#)
[Caves](#) (India)

East Asia

Chinese

Prehistoric artwork such as painted pottery in [Neolithic](#) China can be traced back to the [Yangshao culture](#) and [Longshan culture](#) of the Yellow River valley. During China's [Bronze Age](#), Chinese of the ancient [Shang dynasty](#) and [Zhou dynasty](#) produced multitudes of artistic bronzeware vessels for practical purposes, but also for religious ritual and [geomancy](#). The earliest (surviving) Chinese paintings date to the [Warring States](#) period, and they were on [silk](#) as well as [lacquerwares](#).

One of ancient China's most famous artistic relics remains the [Terracotta warriors](#), an assembly of 8,099 individual and life-size terracotta figures (such as infantry, horses with chariots and cavalry, archers, and military officers), buried in the tomb of [Qin Shi Huang](#), the First Qin Emperor, in 210 BC. This tradition was carried into the subsequent [Han dynasty](#), although their tombs contained miniature versions of the soldiers in addition to domestic servants to serve rulers and nobility in the afterlife. Chinese art arguably shows more continuity between ancient and modern periods than that of any other civilization, as even when foreign dynasties took the Imperial throne they did not impose new cultural or religious habits and were relatively quickly assimilated.



Standing statue of a king and shaman leader; c. 1200–1000 BC; probably bronze; total height: 2.62 m; [Sanxingdui Museum](#) (Guanghan, Sichuan province, China)



[Houmuwu ding](#), the largest ancient bronze ever found; 1300–1046 BC; bronze; [National Museum of China](#) (Beijing)



Altar set; late 11th century BC; bronze; overall (table): height: 18.1 cm, width: 46.4 cm, depth: 89.9 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



One of the warriors of the [Terracotta Army](#), a famous collection of terracotta sculptures depicting the armies of [Qin Shi Huang](#), the first [Emperor of China](#)



Golden Jade-clothes. It is now in the [Hebei Museum](#). It is the highest standard funeral costume in the Han dynasty

Japanese

The eras of Japanese art correspond to the locations of various governments. The earliest known Japanese artifacts are attributable to the Aniu tribe, who influenced the Jōmon people, and these eras came to be known as the [Jōmon](#) and [Yayoi](#) time periods. Before the Yayoi invaded Japan, Jimmu in 660 B.C. was the crowned emperor. Later came the Haniwa of the Kofun era, then the Asuka when Buddhism reached Japan from China. Religion influenced Japanese art significantly for centuries thereafter.^[23]



Dogū; 1000–300 BC;
earthenware with cord-
marked and incised
decoration; height: 16.5 cm,
width: 16.2 cm, depth:
7.9 cm; [Metropolitan
Museum of Art](#) (New York
City)



Jar; circa 100 BC-100 AD;
burnished earthenware;
diameter: 29.8 cm, overall:
19 cm; [Cleveland Museum of
Art](#) (Cleveland, Ohio, US)



Dōtaku; 100-200 AD; cast
bronze; overall: 97.8 x
48.9 cm; [Cleveland Museum
of Art](#)



The Warrior in Keiko Armor;
6th century; haniwa
(terracotta tomb figurine);
height: 130.5 cm; [Tokyo
National Museum](#) (Japan)

Mesoamerica

Olmec

The ancient [Olmec](#) "Bird Vessel" and bowl, both [ceramic](#) and dating to circa 1000 BC as well as other [ceramics](#) are produced in [kilns](#) capable of exceeding approximately 900 °C. The only other [prehistoric](#) culture known to have achieved such high temperatures is that of [Ancient Egypt](#).^[2]

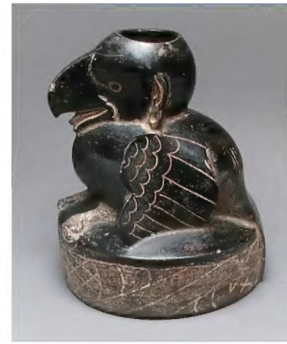
Much Olmec art is highly stylized and uses iconography reflective of the religious meaning of the artworks. Some Olmec art, however, is surprisingly naturalistic, displaying an accuracy of the depiction of human anatomy perhaps equaled in the pre-Columbian New World only by the best Maya Classic era art. Olmec art forms emphasize monumental statuary and small [jade](#) carvings. A common theme is to be found in representations of a divine [jaguar](#). [Olmec figurines](#) were also found abundantly through their period.



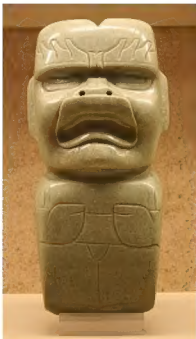
Colossal Head N° 1 of [San Lorenzo](#). A historical person, likely an Olmec leader, is depicted in this monumental sculpture found at [San Lorenzo](#) (in [Tabasco, Mexico](#)), a principal Olmec centre



Seated figurine; 12th–9th century BC; painted ceramic; height: 34 cm, width: 31.8 cm, depth: 14.6 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (New York City)



Bird-shaped vessel; 12th–9th century BC; ceramic with red [ochre](#); height: 16.5 cm; [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)



[Kunz axe](#); 1200–400 BC; polished green quartz ([aventurine](#)); height: 29 cm, width: 13.5 cm; [British Museum](#) (London)

See also

- [History of art](#)
- [Timeline of art](#)

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